

Union Ridge

Conservation Opportunity Area



Central Dissected
Till Plains



Union Ridge Conservation Area provides one of the best examples of savanna restoration in northern Missouri.

Mike Jones, Missouri Department of Conservation

Over 6 million acres of savanna occurred in Missouri prior to the 1800s. Today, these grasslands with scattered trees and shrubs have nearly vanished. Savanna and associated prairie and woodland natural communities were historically maintained by natural or human-caused fires and grazing by bison and elk.

The Union Ridge Conservation Opportunity Area (COA) provides one of the best opportunities for savanna, woodland and prairie management in northern Missouri. Native prairie and savanna once occupied many of the landscape's ridges and upper slopes; woodlands occurred on side slopes and draws.

Common species such as northern bobwhite, red-

headed woodpeckers, field sparrows and brown thrashers occur in these savanna and woodland communities. There is great potential to improve populations of northern bobwhite as a result of natural community management in the Union Ridge COA.

Spring Creek is a characteristic prairie stream that runs through Union Ridge COA. Brassy minnows, a Missouri species of conservation concern, occur in Spring Creek and North Spring Creek. Several tributaries of Spring Creek serve as potential reintroduction sites for Topeka shiners, a federally endangered fish. Topeka shiners and brassy minnows live in small, moderately clear prairie creeks with permanent pools and sandy or gravelly bottoms.

Union Ridge Conservation Strategies

- Increase public understanding about savannas; educate the public about savanna community management and the fish and wildlife that live in savanna landscapes.
- Expand savanna and woodland community management on public and private lands.
- Conserve savanna and woodland plants and animals.
- Conserve aquatic life.
- Protect and manage riparian corridors.



Elsa Gallagher, Missouri Department of Conservation

Prescribed fires rejuvenate desirable plants, control herbaceous weeds and woody plants and improve the value of vegetation to livestock and wildlife.

Priority Research and Inventory Needs

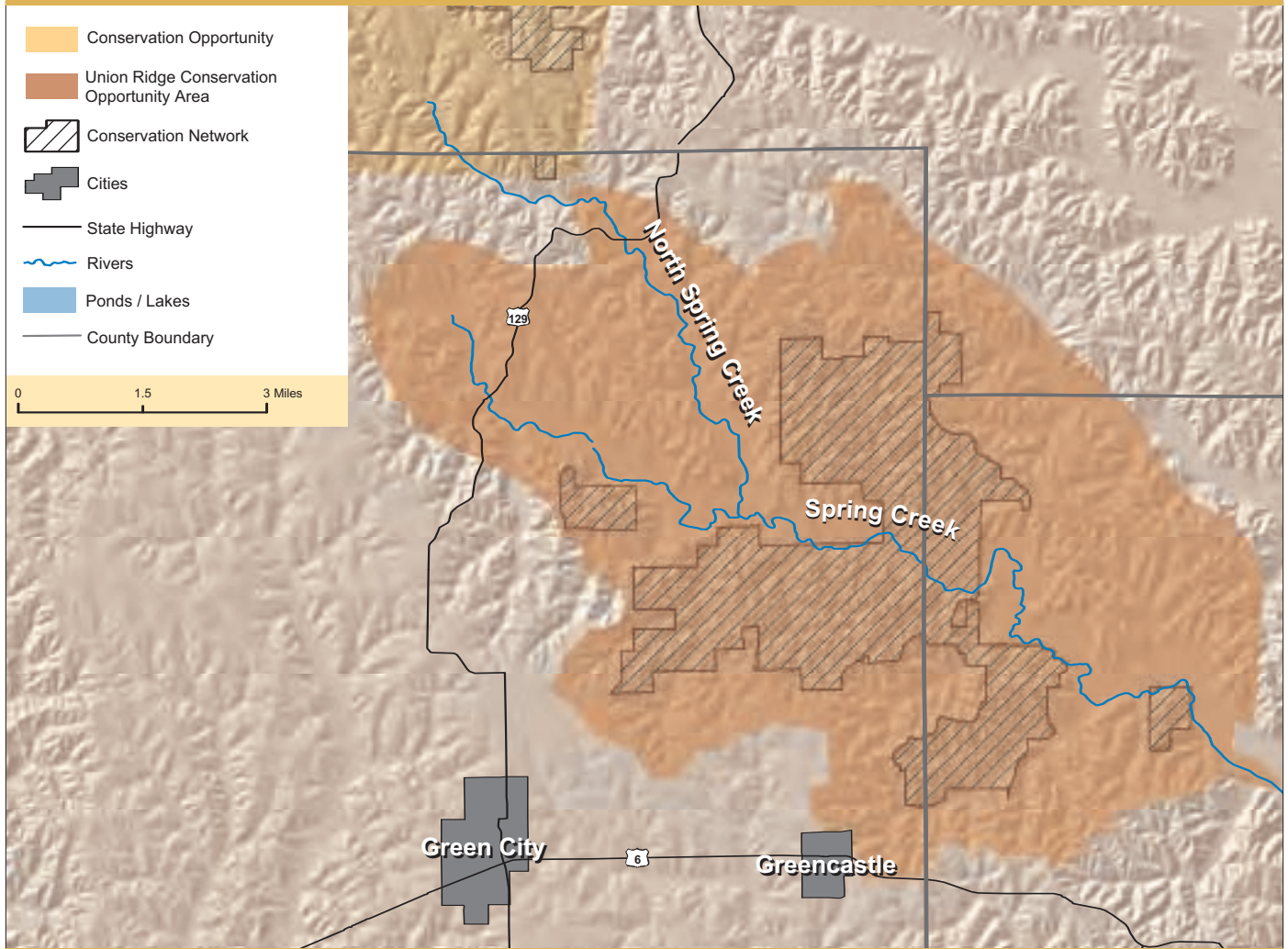
- Inventory streams; evaluate potential habitat for Topeka shiner reintroduction.
- Conduct a stream community inventory (including the existing brassy minnow population).
- Assess location and abundance of problem exotic plants.
- Conduct plant and animal inventories (wildflowers, wildlife communities, tree composition).
- Inventory and prioritize savanna restoration areas.
- Research savanna reconstruction methods.
- Develop and conduct a landowner survey.
- Inventory condition of riparian corridor.

Conservation Partners

Existing: Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC)

Potential: Quail Unlimited (QU); National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf); Missouri Prairie Foundation; Pheasants Forever; Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation (MCHF); private landowners; University of Missouri Extension; Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)

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Funding Sources

Existing: MDC annual budget; MDC Private Lands Cost Share Program; Farm Service Agency Conservation Reserve Program

Promising Future Sources: NWTF Wild Turkey Super Fund; QU Quail Habitat Incentive Funds; USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program; NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program; NRCS Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program; NRCS Grassland Reserve Program; NRCS Conservation Security Program; Missouri Bird Conservation Initiative grants; MDC State Wildlife Grants; MDC Wildlife Diversity Funds; MDC Technical Service Provider Reimbursed Funds; MCHF Stream Stewardship Trust Fund; MCHF Grants; National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Grants

Existing Conservation Network

Union Ridge Conservation Area; Shoemaker Conservation Area; Dark Hollow Natural Area



Bobwhite quail thrive in landscapes with a mixture of prairie, savanna and woodland habitats.

Jim Rathert,
Missouri
Department of
Conservation

Prescribed Fire in a Savanna Landscape



A 1,500-acre portion of the Union Ridge Conservation Area is currently managed to restore prairie and savanna communities. Through the use of prescribed burning, the restoration is converting a former fescue pasture to a diverse mix of native grasses and wildflowers. Characteristic species such as big bluestem, little bluestem, pale purple coneflower, prairie clover and leadplant are now flourishing, increasing the aesthetic appeal and wildlife value of these habitats.

Missouri Department of Conservation

Conservation Challenges

The Union Ridge Conservation Opportunity Area is a mosaic of grasslands, cropland, old fields, prairies, savannas and woodlands. Savannas and woodlands once so widespread are just beginning to undergo limited restoration. Potential challenges to conservation success include limited

landowner understanding of savanna ecosystems, a lack of trained contractors for prescribed burns, conflicting recreational uses on public lands, difficulty of using prescribed burns on private land and limited funding and staff time.

To learn more about the Union Ridge Conservation Opportunity Area, please contact:



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